

December 11, 2018

Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary
Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: WC Docket No. 18-336 and CC Docket No. 92-105 regarding the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2018.

Dear Madam,

United Way of Olmsted County appreciates the opportunity to comment on the current effort undertaken by the Federal Communications Commission to study the feasibility of designating a three-digit number to the National Suicide Hotline and to assess the effectiveness of the current National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. In Olmsted County, our United Way is fighting for the health, education, and financial stability by investing in strategies that unite people and resources, such as 211, as well as tackling critical local issues like early childhood development, educational equity, and housing stability.

We acknowledge efforts are needed to create a safe place for all people to call – especially underserved or marginalized populations such as seniors, people with physical or intellectual disabilities, people that identify as LGBTQ+, veterans, American Natives, non-English speakers, and individuals facing complex problems such as substance use disorders, human trafficking, and domestic violence. Our organization has a 93-year history of partnering with people in need, and today we partner with hundreds of local public- and private-sector stakeholders to drive systemic changes to solve our community's toughest problems like mental health and crisis.

We encourage the FCC to consider our 211 work here in Olmsted County as a vital partner in increasing access to suicide prevention and intervention services. Since the FCC designation of 211 in 2000, we have invested approximately \$550,000 in the success of 211 and help to connect more than 1,000 of our neighbors to crucial local resources each year. Moreover, each year our United Way invests more than \$1.7M in mental health, substance use, health, education, and financial stability programs. These critical investments position us to be key partners in the success of an improved mental health and crisis response system.

Another three-digit code may erode the simplicity of a single point of access for community help. Despite concerted efforts by numerous social services, and multiple hotlines, in our community to educate and market the distinctions, a person in crisis will likely always reach for the most familiar or most accessible number. Our 211 receives

calls that are better suited for 911, and our 911 partners often receive calls that we can best answer. We recommend that resources should be invested to improve a unified single point of access with a blended partnership of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and United Way's 211 services. We believe in the power of partnership to address gaps, not duplicate services, and are a valuable partner in the fight against suicide.

You can learn more about our work at <https://www.uwolmsted.org/> and <https://www.211unitedway.org/> and can reach my office for additional questions or discussion at 507-287-2000. Thank you for your time in addressing this important issue and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jerome Ferson', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Jerome Ferson
President
United Way of Olmsted County